

**CLAIMS:**

1. A system for providing to a community of users access to a plurality of online courses comprising:

- 5 a) a plurality of user computers, each user computer associated with a user of the system having predefined characteristics indicative of a predetermined role in the system, each role providing a level of access to a plurality of data files associated with a course and a level of control over data files associated with a course,  
10 and
- b) a server computer in communication with each of the user computers over a network, the server computer comprising  
15 means for storing a plurality of data files associated with a course;  
means for assigning a level of access to each file, the level of access associated with the ability of a user to access the file;  
20 means for determining an access level of a user requesting access to a file;  
means for allowing access to a file associated with a course as a function of the  
25 access level of the user.

2. The system of claim 1 wherein the user roles comprise a student role associated with a student user, an instructor role associated with an instructor user, and

an administrator role associated with an administrator user.

5 3. The system of claim 2 wherein the instructor user is provided with an access level to enable the creation and editing of a plurality of files associated with a course.

10 4. The system of claim 3 wherein the course files comprise an announcement file.

5. The system of claim 3 wherein the course files comprise a course information file.

15 6. The system of claim 3 wherein the course files comprise a staff information file.

7. The system of claim 3 wherein the course files comprise a course documents file.

20 8. The system of claim 3 wherein the course files comprise an assignments file.

25 9. The system of claim 3 wherein the course files comprise a dropbox file.

10. The system of claim 3 wherein the course files comprise an asynchronous communication file.

11. The system of claim 3 wherein the course files  
comprise a synchronous communication file.
12. The system of claim 3 wherein the student user is  
provided with an access level to enable reading of a  
plurality of files associated with a course.
13. The system of claim 12 wherein the student user is  
provided with an access level to enable modification  
of a subset of the plurality of files associated  
with a course.
14. The system of claim 12 wherein the user is provided  
with an access level to enable creation of a student  
file associated with a file for which the student  
user is able to read.
15. The system of claim 14 in which the file that the  
student is able to read is an assessment file  
created by the instructor user, and the student file  
created by the student user is a response to the  
assessment file.
16. The system of claim 15 wherein the assessment file  
is comprises a plurality of examination questions  
selected by the instructor user to assess the  
ability of the student user.
17. The system of claim 16 wherein the examination  
questions are selected by the instructor user from a

predetermined pool of available examination questions.

- 5 18. The system of claim 16 wherein the examination questions are created by the instructor user substantially at the time of the creation of the assessment file.
- 10 19. The system of claim 16 wherein the student file is reviewed by the instructor user and assigned a grade.
- 15 20. The system of claim 19 wherein the grade is made available to the student user.
- 20 21. The system of claim 19 wherein the instructor user collates a plurality of grades obtained from reviewing a plurality of student files, and wherein the collated grades are made available to all student users associated with the course.
- 25 22. The system of claim 14 in which the file that the student is able to read is an assignment file created by the instructor user, and the student file created by the student user is a response to the assignment file.
23. The system of claim 9 wherein the dropbox file comprises a plurality of files transferred to the

server computer from one or more student users associated with the course.

5 24. The system of claim 23 wherein the instructor user is provided with access to the files in the dropbox file, whereby the instructor user may download, edit and upload the files in the dropbox.

10 25. The system of claim 1 wherein a user is required to enter a login sequence into a user computer in order to be provided with access to course files associated with that user.

15 26. The system of claim 25 wherein the user is provided with access to all courses with which the user is associated after entry of the logon sequence.

20 27. The system of claim 26 wherein the user is provided with a web page comprising a plurality of course hyperlinks, each of said course hyperlinks associated with each course that the user has enrolled in.

25 28. The system of claim 27 wherein selection of a course hyperlink will provide the user with a web page associated with the selected course, the web page comprising a plurality of content hyperlinks to various content areas associated with the course.

29. The system of claim 28 wherein said content  
hyperlinks comprise an announcement area hyperlink,  
a course information hyperlink, a staff information  
hyperlink, a course documents hyperlink, an  
5 assignments hyperlink, a communications hyperlink,  
and a student tools hyperlink.
30. The system of claim 29 wherein selection of the  
announcement area hyperlink provides a web page  
10 comprising a group of course announcements.
31. The system of claim 29 wherein selection of the  
course information hyperlink provides a web page  
comprising information regarding the associated  
15 course.
32. The system of claim 29 wherein selection of the  
staff information hyperlink provides a web page  
comprising data regarding the instructors of the  
20 associated course.
33. The system of claim 29 wherein selection of the  
course documents hyperlink provides a web page  
comprising a listing of documents associated with  
25 the course.
34. The system of claim 33 wherein the listing of course  
documents comprise active hyperlinks to the  
documents.
- 30

35. The system of claim 29 wherein selection of the assignments hyperlink provides a web page comprising a group of course assignments.

5 36. The system of claim 29 wherein selection of the communications hyperlink provides a web page comprising hyperlinks to a group of communication tools comprising an asynchronous communication tool and a synchronous communication tool.

10

37. A system for providing to a community of users access to a plurality of online courses, comprising a server computer in communication with each of a plurality of user computers over a network, the server computer comprising means for creating a plurality of course user accounts from a file of existing user accounts associated with an external computer.

15

20 38. A method for providing online education comprising a. establishing a course to be offered online, comprising the steps of:

25

- i. an instructor user generating a set of course files for use with teaching the course;
- ii. transferring the course files to a server computer for storage thereat; and
- iii. making access to the course files available to a predefined community of student users having access to the server computer over a network;

30

- b. offering the course to be taken online to a group of student users; and
- c. providing access over the network to the course files to a student user who has enrolled in the course.

5

39. The method of claim 38 wherein at least one of the course files comprises a course assignment, further comprising the steps of:

10

- d) the student user creating a student file in response to the course assignment; and
- e) the student user transferring the student file to the server computer.

15

40. The method of claim 39 further comprising the steps of:

20

- f) the instructor user accessing the student file from the server computer;
- g) the instructor user reviewing the student file to determine compliance with the course assignment; and
- h) the instructor user assigning a grade to the student file as a function of the determination of compliance with the course assignment.

25

41. The method of claim 40 further comprising the step of the instructor user posting the grade to a file on the server computer accessible only to the student user with which the grade is associated.



42. The method of claim 40 further comprising the steps of the instructor repeating the steps (f), (g) and (h) for a plurality of student users that are enrolled in the course.

5

43. The method of claim 42 further comprising the step of the instructor user performing a statistical analysis on the grades assigned to the plurality of student users.

10 44. The method of claim 43 further comprising the step of making results of the statistical analysis available to the student users enrolled in the course.

15 45. The method of claim 38 further comprising the step of providing an asynchronous communication tool accessible to student users enrolled in the course for enabling asynchronous communication amongst the student users.

20 46. The method of claim 38 further comprising the step of providing a synchronous communication tool accessible to student users enrolled in the course for enabling synchronous communication amongst the student users.